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ABSTRACT

This manual is intended to assist families of young children with disabilities in their child's transition from early intervention services to preschool or other educational services at age 3. It provides information about the transition process, federal and state laws that apply to transition, and options for services and program placements. The manual suggests strategies to help families prepare for transition and participate in the transition process. Two case studies introduce the manual and contrast positive and negative transition processes. Individual sections of the manual cover the following topics: (1) learning about transition; (2) family involvement in transition planning; (3) preparing for transition; (4) participating as a member of the transition team; (5) parent rights and laws concerning transiton; (6) gathering information and making decisions; and (7) sharing information in the new program. Worksheets and checklists provided throughout the manual and in an appendix are designed to facilitate the manual's usefulness to parents. (DB)

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# PLANNING YOUR CHILD'S TRANSITION TO PRESCHOOL

*A Step-by-Step Guide For Families*

**Family And Child Transitions into Least Restrictive Environments**
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

EC304576



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**About the FACTS/LRE Information Series:** This manual is one in a series designed to provide practical information to the various audiences concerned about transitions: families, educators, service providers, and members of state and local interagency councils. For more information about FACTS/LRE, please turn to the back of this publication.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSITIONS— AND THE AIMS OF FACTS/LRE

Transition—a process in time that occurs between events—takes place throughout our lives. There are the transitions we make quite frequently—traveling between home and work, picking up children after school, cleaning the house or apartment before receiving guests. And then there are transitions that signal the start of a whole new set of activities and routines.

Remember your first day of school? Your child's first day of school or day care? The first day on a new job?

How did you plan for these important transitions? Did you visit in advance? Purchase new clothes? Get a haircut? Double check the bus route?

Transitions often work best if they are planned. Presidents and governors have "transition teams" to assist with these milestones in their lives. The rest of us generally get by without dozens of paid helpers. Still, the decisions that are made, the events that take place and the feelings that arise during transitions have profound consequences in all of our lives.

Young children with special needs and their families experience several transitions. The first transition occurs when the child is born and becomes a member of the family. Other transitions take place as a child's disability or special need is identified and relationships with service providers are established. Later transitions take place as changes are made from one service provider or educational setting to another.

FACTS/LRE means Family And Child Transitions into Least Restrictive Environments. Our project produces publications and offers direct technical assistance to see that the transitions experienced by young children with special needs and their families are not treated as an afterthought but are given the serious attention they deserve. We focus especially on the transition that occurs as a child approaching age three prepares to exit from early intervention services. However, most of our materials are also relevant to transitions that occur at other ages.

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***A Step-by-Step Guide for Families***

Lynette K. Chandler
Susan A. Fowler
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A positive experience with early transitions, such as the transition from early intervention to preschool, can serve as a model for future transitions. Success in transition depends on many factors, one of which is family involvement in the transition process.

This manual is written for families. It is designed to assist families in preparing for the transition from early intervention services to preschool or other educational services at age three. It provides information about the transition process, federal and state laws that apply to transition, and options for services and program placements. This manual also provides strategies that will help families prepare for transition and participate in the transition process. The terms ***parents*** and ***families***, as used in this manual, refer to members of the child's family who are involved in the transition process. This may include biological parents, stepparents, grandparents, surrogate parents, foster parents, caretakers, guardians, brothers and sisters, and other people who are considered to be members of the family.

It is important to remember that not all of the guidelines that are presented in this manual may apply to your child or family. You should select those that address the needs of your child and that match your family's interests and concerns. A special feature of the manual is that we have reproduced worksheet pages in an appendix, on perforated, detachable pages, so that families can write on them.

You may have formed a rewarding partnership with your child's early intervention provider. We hope that you will form the same partnership with your child's preschool service providers. This manual was written to help you take those first steps.

First consider the experiences of the Lerner and Paredes families during their first transition from early intervention to preschool.

# THE LERNER FAMILY

Nancy enrolled her daughter, Angela, in the local early intervention program at one year of age after learning that Angela had moderate developmental delays. Nancy is a young single mother who works nights. Both Angela and Nancy live with Nancy's parents, who care for Angela when Nancy works.

Branford, the child development specialist, provides weekly home visits to Angela and Nancy. A speech and language pathologist and physical therapist also provide monthly consultation to Branford and Nancy. Nancy works closely with everyone to learn activities that she can do with Angela between visits.

A few months after Angela turned two years of age, Branford told Nancy that they needed to begin thinking about the transition from the early intervention program to preschool services. Branford and Nancy scheduled a meeting to talk about the transition process. At this meeting, Branford helped Nancy identify how she wanted to be involved, as well as her concerns and priorities regarding the transition. They also discussed state and federal laws related to preschool services and the potential range of options for preschool.

Six months before Angela's third birthday, Nancy met with a transition team that included Branford and a representative from the local school district. As required by law, they amended Angela's individualized family service plan (IFSP) to include several goals that would help prepare Angela and Nancy for the transition. They also identified three programs that might be good options for preschool. Nancy and Branford visited each of these programs and then met again with staff from the early intervention program and the local school district to review Angela's evaluations and her eligibility for continued services at age 3. At this meeting Nancy shared information about Angela and her preferences for services and a new program. The staff shared information about the assessments they had conducted, their recommendations for continued services, and their recommendations for Angela's new program. The team members were careful to identify Angela's strengths and the progress she had made, as well as her needs. Nancy then worked with the staff to identify the services Angela needed and the preschool program that would address Angela's strengths and best meet her needs.

A month before Angela moved to the new program Nancy and Angela visited with the new teacher, Lisa. Nancy told Lisa about herself and Angela, and Lisa shared information about her preschool program. Together they identified some goals to work on at the beginning of the year. Angela had a chance to explore the classroom and play with several toys.

During her final home visit, Nancy told Branford that she was feeling a lot of different emotions. She said she really liked Lisa, the new teacher, and felt like the new program would be able to meet Angela's needs. She still wasn't sure, however, if she would like having an individualized education program instead of an individualized family service plan. Most of all, she was feeling sad because her little girl was going to school without her and she was nervous about having Angela ride the bus. She was so little! Nancy also said she knew that she and Angela would miss Branford and his home visits. But all in all, Nancy said she was happy to see Angela growing up and was looking forward to the day she started preschool.

# THE PAREDES FAMILY

Jaime Paredes' third birthday was only three months away. He has been in the center-based early intervention program since he was four months of age. Jaime has cerebral palsy and a moderate visual impairment. He receives physical and speech therapy weekly at the center and also attends a center-based classroom three times a week. In addition, he attends a bilingual day care center while his parents, Sergio and Carrie, are at work. Sergio and Carrie meet with Jaime's therapists and teachers at monthly parent meetings to learn activities they can do with Jaime at home.

At the last parent meeting Jaime's teacher, Sandy, told Sergio and Carrie that as soon as Jaime turned three he would no longer be able to come to the early intervention program. She said he needed to start attending the public school preschool program. Sandy asked Sergio and Carrie to sign a release of information form so she could arrange for assessments to be conducted and to send Jaime's records to the preschool. She then gave them the name of the preschool teacher whose class Jaime would attend.

Sergio and Carrie were distressed to learn that Jaime had to leave the early intervention program. They really liked Sandy and the therapist who worked with Jaime. They had thought Jaime would be in this program until kindergarten. This was the first they had heard about children going to public school at age three. He seemed too young to do this.

When Carrie called the school, the preschool teacher said she would like to meet Jaime, Carrie, and Sergio, but she didn't have time to do this until Jamie's placement staffing later that month. Unfortunately, the placement meeting was scheduled during the afternoon, a time that Sergio could not attend, so Carrie attended the staffing meeting by herself. At this meeting, she was informed that Jaime would attend preschool five mornings a week and would receive physical and speech therapy two times a month. Carrie received a manual that described parent rights, a blank copy of something called an IEP, the address of the preschool, the dates that school would start, and a schedule for bus pick-up and drop-off. She also signed a lot of forms. The new teacher said they would fill out the IEP as soon as the school psychologist completed the testing.

This was the last Sergio and Carrie heard about the transition until Jaime's last day in the early intervention program. When Sandy commented that Jaime was getting so big and was lucky to be going to preschool, all of the apprehension and questions that remained unanswered came back. Sergio and Carrie still wondered why Jaime couldn't stay in the early intervention program, what the new program would be like, and how Jaime would do in a new program. They were not looking forward to Jaime's first day of school and were not sure that they would let him go.

The Lerner and Paredes families had very different experiences with transition. The transition for Angela Lerner and her family was well planned, started early, and involved the parent, Nancy, as a partner on the transition team. On the other hand, the transition for Jaime Paredes and his parents was poorly planned—Sergio and Carrie were not really involved in the decision-making process. Carrie said that she often felt like they were being "done to" instead of "done with."

The differences in transition experienced by these families illustrate the need to actively prepare for transition and to provide families with information and the opportunity to participate in the transition process.

# LEARNING ABOUT TRANSITION

An important step in promoting a positive transition for your child and family is learning about the transition process. At least 3 months before your child makes the move from early intervention to preschool someone from the early intervention program will meet with you to talk about transition and will work with you to develop a transition plan.[1] Some of the topics that should be discussed during transition meetings are:

- What is involved in transition?
- When will your child make the transition to a new program?
- What decisions need to be made related to the changes in service delivery?
- Who will be involved in making decisions?
- When will decisions be made?
- What is your family's role in the transition process?
- Is your child eligible for special education and related services?
- What options are available (for example, community preschool, pre-kindergarten, self-contained special education)?
- How can you get information and learn about service options?
- What are the differences between early intervention and preschool programs?
- What are your child's and family's legal rights related to special education services?
- How can you prepare your child and family for transition?

Your family should feel free to ask questions during transition meetings and at any time during the year. Often it is helpful to make a list of questions or topics that you wish to discuss with program staff or the transition team. Space is provided here for you to write questions that you have or issues that you want to talk about.

_____

_____

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_____

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_____

[1]The federal law requires that planning for transition begin at least 90 days before a child turns 3; in some states, such as Illinois, state law requires that the planning begin even earlier, at least 6 months before the third birthday.

# FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSITION PLANNING

As parents, you have much to offer and much to gain from actively participating in your child's transition. Involved families can learn about the transition process, share valuable information about the child and family, and work with the transition team to make decisions. For many families, participation helps reduce some of the stress that may be associated with transition and makes some of the changes that are required by transition more manageable.

The level and type of participation in the transition process will vary across families, based on each family's interests, resources, and ability to be involved. There is no "ideal" level of participation that fits all families. Your family may be involved in transition in many ways and for varying amounts of time. At the very least, you may learn about the transition process and provide consent for various transition-related activities. Other roles may include:

- sharing information about your child and family,
- asking questions, receiving information, and making decisions about transition goals for your child and family,
- identifying services based on your child's needs, and
- identifying and visiting preschool programs.

Your family should adopt the roles that you are comfortable with—ones that fit your schedule and life style. You also should feel free to change the type and level of participation when desired. For example, you may want to increase your involvement, or be involved in different ways as the time to move to a new program draws near. The list on the following page identifies ways that families have been involved in transition planning. You can use it to start your transition planning. It might be helpful to check items that you are interested in and discuss them with someone in the early intervention program. (See Handout 1.)

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSITION PLANNING

_____ Learn about the transition process and plans that involve my child and family.

_____ Participate in meetings as a member of the planning team.

_____ Participate in evaluating my child's strengths and needs.

_____ Review my child's file and assessment records.

_____ Help select goals that staff will use to prepare my child for transition.

_____ Work on goals to prepare my child and family for upcoming changes.

_____ Help identify my child's educational needs in the new program.

_____ Help identify my child's needs for special services in the new program.

_____ Help identify and evaluate the range of options that are available for preschool programs and services including: (a) school-based programs, (b) community-based programs, and (c) child care or day care programs.

Please list other ways that you would like to be involved in transition.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

# PREPARING FOR TRANSITION

## PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR TRANSITION

One of the objectives of early intervention is to prepare your child for the move to the next program. In order to do this, the transition team should identify transition-related goals that will be placed on the individualized family service plan (IFSP) at least three months before your child's third birthday. Some of these goals will focus on preparing your child for the move to a new setting. Other goals might address your family's concerns, resources, and priorities for transition.

Specific transition goals may range from working with your child on some of the readiness skills that were placed on the IFSP to meeting with other parents who have already completed the transition from early intervention. On the following page are some general strategies that families have used to prepare their children for transition. It also has space for you to check strategies that you might use. (See Handout 2.)

## STRATEGIES THAT FAMILIES HAVE USED TO PREPARE THEIR CHILD FOR PRESCHOOL

_____ Talk to my child about going to a new setting.

_____ Take my child to meet the new program staff and see the new classroom.

_____ Read stories and look at books with my child.

_____ Encourage my child to play alone for short periods of time.

_____ Teach my child self-care skills.

_____ Teach my child to follow simple directions.

_____ Give my child experience with a variety of toys and materials and teach my child how to use toys and materials correctly.

_____ Give my child experience being around other young children.

_____ Teach my child to care for own belongings (for example, how to put toys away, hang coat).

_____ Encourage my child to ask for help when needed.

_____ Encourage my child to communicate with others (children may do this with gestures, spoken language, sign language, etc.).

_____ Encourage my child to make simple choices (for example, ask my child if she wants to wear pink or white socks, what toys he would like to play with, or if she wants cookies or applesauce for snack).

_____ Practice short separations from my child, by leaving him in the care of a responsible adult.

Please list other ways you might prepare your child for transition.

_____

_____

_____

_____

## PREPARING YOUR FAMILY FOR TRANSITION

Transition can be an exciting time, one that can provide new opportunities for your child and family. It also can be a time of great change and adjustment. Your child or family may need to adjust to new teachers and therapists, new children, different schedules and daily routines, new classroom activities, and new options for parent involvement. You may find that both you and your child experience separation anxiety. It may be hard to "let go" of the staff and services in the early intervention program and to learn to trust and communicate with new staff. Your family may need to learn about the public school system, your child's and family's rights, new evaluations and technical terms, and how to advocate for your child when necessary.

All children and families make adjustments during transition. The amount of time required for these adjustments varies across children, families, and programs. It is normal to experience some uncertainty and with that, some stress during transition. This is true for all families and children who start a new program, regardless of whether the child has special needs. Families who participate in transition planning report reduced stress. Strategies that families have used to prepare their child are provided in Handout 3. Some strategies that families have used to prepare for transition are listed below.

- **Plan ahead for transition.** Don't wait until the last minute to begin thinking about transition. Give yourself and your family time to make decisions and adjust to the changes that will occur.

- **Realize that stress, uncertainty, and separation anxiety are normal emotions.** Many, if not all, parents experience these feelings when their child starts preschool or kindergarten.

- **Ask questions throughout the transition process.** You have a right to obtain information about transition and to be involved in the transition planning.

- **Attend transition planning meetings.** Share information with the team about your child and your family, your resources, your priorities, and any concerns that you may have.

- **Talk with other families who have made the transition from early intervention to preschool programs.**

- **Talk with members of your family about transition and some of the changes that may occur.**

- **Learn about your child's and family's rights, how to interact with new program staff, and how to advocate for your child in the new program.**

- **Visit different programs to help select the program that best meets your child's needs.**

- **Try to identify aspects of the new program that may be different or difficult for your child and give your child experiences with these aspects before the new program begins.** For example, if you think that your child will have trouble working or playing alone, you might give your child an opportunity to play alone for short periods of time each day.

# PARTICIPATING AS A MEMBER OF THE TRANSITION TEAM

## *TRANSITION TEAM MEMBERS*

An important step in planning for transition is deciding who will be involved and who will serve as members of the transition team. The transition team will work together to develop a transition plan, amend the IFSP, and prepare for the change in programs. The transition team will include family members, staff from the early intervention program, and staff from the potential preschool programs. If your child attends or receives services from more than one early intervention program or will attend or receive services from more than one preschool program, staff from each of these programs should participate on the transition team. This list contains spaces in which to write the names and telephone numbers of transition team members.

**FROM YOUR FAMILY**

| Name | Relationship to Child | Telephone Number |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**FROM THE CURRENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

| Name | Role | Telephone Number |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**FROM THE POTENTIAL NEW PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

| Name | Role | Telephone Number |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**OTHERS**

| Name | Role | Telephone Number |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

## BEING PART OF THE TRANSITION TEAM

Building a relationship takes time, effort, trust, mutual respect, and communication. Here are some additional tips for working on a team that may help both families and professionals work together as they plan for transition.

- **Treat each member of the team as an equal.** Remember that each team member brings different expertise, values, and resources to the meeting.
- **Seek information.** It is okay to say "I don't know," "I don't understand," or to ask for assistance or for more information.
- **Share information that will help team members understand your concerns and priorities.** Do not be afraid to state your opinion, answer questions, and discuss your priorities.
- **Share thoughts and feelings about your child's abilities.**
- **Be honest, clear, and direct about your child's needs and your family's concerns, resources, and priorities.**
- **Remember that differences of opinion are okay and are to be expected.** Team meetings are an opportunity to listen to all points of view and to make decisions using negotiation and problem solving.
- **Try to avoid letting past negative experiences influence your current behavior and interactions with members of the team.**
- **Listen to each member of the team.** Try to identify the reasons for their needs or recommendations.
- **Invite other family members or friends who can offer support and advice to attend transition team meetings.**
- **Be sure you are satisfied with decisions that are made before agreeing to them.** If you are not satisfied, be sure to talk to the rest of the team about it.
- **Select a level of team involvement that you are comfortable with and that fits your schedule.**
- **Generate multiple suggestions to address each issue discussed and identify the pros and cons of all suggestions before selecting one.**
- **Carry through on tasks that you have agreed to do.**

During transition team meetings, information will be shared among all team members. Important decisions about special services, goals, and the new program will be made. Many families are uncomfortable talking with professionals during these team meetings. Some families may hesitate to ask questions, make

suggestions, share information, or express their opinions to professionals. If interacting with professionals is difficult for your family, you might develop a list of questions or topics that are important to you and take this written list with you. You also might practice asking questions, sharing information, or expressing opinions with other family members, friends, or a professional with whom you feel comfortable prior to team meetings.

Consider talking to a staff member about your questions and concerns before group meetings. This person can support you when you talk during meetings or can act as your representative, bringing up issues or questions. This person can be sure that there is an opportunity for you to talk by asking if you have information to share or questions to ask. This will provide you with the opportunity to communicate with others without having to start the interaction. Finally, you may schedule a follow-up meeting with members of the team in order to ask questions or provide additional information.

How many meetings will be held to plan a child's and family's transition? It depends, of course, on your availability and your child's needs, as well as the availability of program staff. We recommend that the first meeting to exchange information and plan the transition process occurs six months before the third birthday. At this meeting you will write the transition plan for the IFSP, discuss what new evaluations may be necessary to determine your child's continued eligibility for services, and identify which agency (early intervention or school district) will conduct the evaluation.

A second meeting will be necessary prior to the transition to confirm your child's eligibility, based on the evaluations, and to identify your child's needs and the services that will be necessary to meet your child's needs. This meeting is often referred to as a ***multidisciplinary staffing*** or ***conference*** (MDC). It includes service providers who are involved in the evaluations, as well as your child's current and potential future service providers. Once your child's eligibility for services is confirmed, it is important to determine specifics about these services. This is usually done during an individualized education program (IEP) meeting. During this meeting, the team develops goals and objectives and discusses the services that the child will receive. Issues to be discussed include: (a) the type of services your child is eligible to receive, (b) when services are to be provided, (c) how long services will be provided, (d) how intense the services are to be, and (e) where services will be provided. This means that your child's placement should not be determined before this meeting. The IEP meeting may be combined with the MDC or may take place at a later meeting. This varies from district to district. It is important that you discuss your preferences for combining or separating the IEP meeting from the MDC with your school district and early intervention program.

# PARENT RIGHTS AND LAWS CONCERNING TRANSITION

Public Law 99-457 (reauthorized in 1991 as Public Law 102-119) outlines the requirements that states are to follow in providing early intervention and preschool services. This section provides information on how this federal law addresses transition and some of the differences between early intervention and preschool programs that may affect families during transition.

## TRANSITION AS PART OF THE IFSP

Public Law 99-457 requires early intervention programs to address the transition from early intervention to preschool programs or other services. The steps that will be taken to promote transition must be included on the IFSP at least three months before the child's third birthday. Specifically, the IFSP must describe the following steps: (a) discussions with and training for parents concerning future placements and other issues related to transition; (b) procedures to prepare the child for the change in programs and steps to help the child adjust to or function well in the new program; and (c) the transfer of information about the child to the next program, including assessment and evaluation information and copies of IFSPs. Written family consent is required before information is transferred.

The IFSP should also include dates for when the child will move from early intervention to preschool programs and services. This ensures that there is no break in services between early intervention and the initiation of new services. Some states allow children to receive early intervention services until the end of the school year to allow the child to start the new program at the beginning of summer or on the first day of the new school year. Other states require children to enter the new program when they turn age three. Regardless of which option is used, there should be no disruption of services between programs. That is, your child should not be on a waiting list and without services.

Many programs will develop a transition timeline in order to identify what steps will be followed in transition, who is responsible for each step, and when each step will be accomplished. This timeline may become part of the IFSP. A sample timeline is presented on the next page and in Handout 6. It lists steps that are required by law as part of the IFSP and steps that are options to consider when developing a transition plan. Steps that are required by law as part of the IFSP appear with an asterisk.

## SAMPLE TRANSITION TIMELINE

| Date | Responsibility | |
|---|---|---|
| _____ | _____ | Hold first planning meeting to begin the transition process. |
| _____ | _____ | Develop a transition plan and provide information concerning child and parent rights.* |
| _____ | _____ | Identify goals and methods to prepare the child and family for transition.* |
| _____ | _____ | The family provides consent for release of information to public school and other programs or services.* |
| _____ | _____ | Identify necessary evaluations to determine eligibility for continued special education services and conduct evaluations.* |
| _____ | _____ | The transition team discusses eligibility for continued special education services and other issues related to transition, and identifies future program options (MDC meeting).* |
| _____ | _____ | Members of the transition team visit program options. |
| _____ | _____ | If the child is eligible to receive special education services, the transition team writes the IEP and identifies new program(s) and services. |
| _____ | _____ | The family and child visit the new program, meet with the teacher and related services staff. |
| _____ | _____ | The early intervention staff transfers records and contacts the new program staff to exchange information.* |
| _____ | _____ | The child starts the new program on the eligible or agreed upon date.* |
| _____ | _____ | The family meets with the new program staff to assess child adjustment. |
| _____ | _____ | Early intervention and the new program staff evaluate the transition process, including child adjustment and family satisfaction. |

Steps that are required as part of the IFSP appear with an asterisk.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EARLY INTERVENTION AND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

The federal laws concerning early intervention and preschool special education programs create several differences between programs that may affect your child and family during transition. Knowledge of the differences between the laws that cover early intervention and the laws that govern services to three to five year olds may help your family and other members of the transition team prepare for the changes that will occur. This knowledge also may help the transition team to understand the full range of options for programs and services that should be available to meet the educational needs of your child.

### INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

**Individualized educational programs.** One difference between programs may be the change from an individualized family service plan (IFSP) to an individualized educational program (IEP). When children receive services through the public school at age three, the services typically are determined through an IEP. An IEP identifies goals and strategies related to the child; family-focused goals are not specifically identified, and preschool programs are not required to assess family concerns, resources, and priorities. Some preschool programs may continue to use IFSPs; however, the option to do this belongs to the public school. The change from an IFSP to an IEP may provide fewer opportunities for direct parent participation in their child's services, unless members of the team specifically address these issues.

### SERVICE COORDINATION

**Service coordination.** Another difference between early intervention and preschool programs that may be of concern to families is the opportunity for service coordination. Service coordination is not specifically required for children and families after the child turns 3 and receives services through the public school system. Many parents find that when their child enters preschool they need to take a more active role in advocating for their child and coordinating services between multiple agencies (for example, Park and Recreation Services, Public Health, child care) and program staff. As parents, you may wish to request information and or training regarding community services, service coordination, and advocacy as part of your preparation for transition. When your child enters preschool, you have the right to request training related to your child's program.

### DIAGNOSTIC LABELS

**Diagnostic labels.** Diagnostic labels are another factor that families may face as a child transitions from early intervention to public school services. Public Law 99-457 allows children from birth to three years of age to receive special services with the label of developmental delay or at risk of developmental delay. This law also gives states the option of using either the developmental delay label (noncategorical) or federally prescribed (categorical) labels (for example, mentally retarded, visually impaired) for children from three to five years of age. Some states require children to receive a categorical label in order to receive public preschool services, other states do not. Thus for some families, part of the

transition process may involve a change in diagnostic or categorical label. Parents must provide consent for the evaluations that will be done as part of the transition process.

## LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

**Least restrictive environment.** Children who are eligible to receive special education services at age 3 should receive them in what has been termed the ***least restrictive environment***. This generally means that children have a right to attend classes or programs with children who do not have special needs. This option may be new to families who have received early intervention services in the home or in center-based programs that serve only children with special needs. The least restrictive requirement means that parents have the right to consider preschool programs that enroll children with special needs and children who do not have special needs.

Least restrictive environments for young children might include: (a) participation at least part of the time in Head Start or other public agencies that serve preschool children; (b) placement in a private community program that may or may not enroll other children with special needs; or (c) placement in segregated classes for children with special needs that are offered in regular education elementary schools.

Many states are meeting this requirement by placing preschool classes for children with disabilities in regular education school buildings. However, some states and school districts also provide special education services in other programs such as community preschools or Head Start programs.

In order to identify the least restrictive environment for your child the transition team should identify both the special education and related services that your child will need in a new program (for example, speech therapy) and what program options are available in your community (for example, school-based preschool, community preschool programs). After you have visited different programs, you may meet with the team to discuss which program you believe best meets the needs of your child and how special education and related services could be delivered in that program.

## OTHER DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PROGRAMS

**Other differences between programs.** There may be other differences between early intervention and preschool programs that are not created by federal laws. These differences may be unique to your community or may only affect your family and not others. Your family and other members of the transition team may identify these differences after comparing preschool programs with the early intervention program and services. Some of the differences that might occur between early intervention and preschool programs are:

- location of services (home-based verses center-based services),
- integrated or inclusive settings verses segregated settings,
- frequency and availability of special education and related services,

- options and requirements for family participation,
- amount and type of communication between parents and program staff, and
- options for home visits and methods of assisting parents in working with their child at home.

It is important to identify potential differences between programs and to determine how they may affect your child and family. You will probably find some of the differences between programs to be helpful for your child and family. Other differences may require time to adjust to or learn about. Families often indicate that knowing what to expect helps them to decide if the differences should be addressed as part of the transition plan. This knowledge also helps family members prepare for the changes that may occur, thereby, reducing transition-related stress.

# GATHERING INFORMATION AND MAKING DECISIONS

One of the most important decisions that will be made during transition planning is the identification of services for your child and the selection of the place(s) or location(s) in which those services will be provided. This decision process includes identifying what special education services need to be provided, how often special services should be provided, the type of program your child will attend, and whether your child will attend more than one program.

Each family will determine their role in making decisions about the new services and program. Some families will involve other members of the transition team in selecting a new program, some will select a new program with minimal input from the transition team, and other families will ask program staff to select a new program. Each of these types of participation can be appropriate for different families. Your family should determine how you will make decisions concerning a new program based on your concerns, resources, and priorities. Ultimately, families will decide if they will accept services offered by the school district.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

The first step in selecting a new program is to identify your child's needs and what special education and related services and supports will meet your child's needs in the new program. This is usually done in your child's IEP meeting. Services might include speech therapy, physical therapy, or occupational therapy. Support can mean many things, among them: an individual assistant, nondisabled peers, and curriculum adaptations and modifications. For example, when a child is receiving services in a community setting, supports also can include meeting time between the district special education staff and the community staff. The special education and related services and supports for which your child is eligible will be written on his or her IEP. These special education and related services and supports must be available to your child in the setting that you and the team select. How those services are provided will be determined by the public school program and your family. In some cases families may request that services be provided in their home.

## PROGRAM OPTIONS

The second step in selecting a new program is to determine what program options are available within the community. For some families and communities there may be many options to consider in selecting a new program. For other families there may be only one preschool program in the community. Nonetheless, decisions concerning special services, transportation, child goals, and other options will need to be made.

Staff within the early intervention program and public school programs should be familiar with the options that are available for preschool. You may already be familiar with community programs such as day care programs that could provide child care services to your child.

Special education and related services might be provided in the following settings:

- preschool special education programs within the public school system,
- at-risk or pre-kindergarten programs within the public school system,
- private day care programs,
- family day care,
- university-based child care programs,
- community preschool programs,
- Head Start programs, and
- home-based services.

The majority of programs outside of the public school do not routinely provide special services as a part of their program. However, it is often possible to request that the district provide special education and related services in a community-based preschool or child care program. For example, the school district may have a speech and language therapist provide services to children identified as having speech and language needs (as stated in their IEP) who are attending Head Start or a community-based preschool program. Where the services are provided will be determined by you and the public school district personnel. Some districts will agree to have services follow the child, no matter where the location for service delivery—some districts will not.

Although Public Law 94-142 (now referred to as IDEA) stipulates that special education services and related services be provided in the least restrictive environment, the team must reach consensus on what the least restrictive environment actually means. Determination of the least restrictive environment begins by looking at the setting that the child would be considered for if he or she did not have a disability. The next step in determining least restrictive environment is to look at that setting with supports. The team then moves on to discuss more restrictive settings, which might be a self-contained special education classroom in a regular school building—and so on. This in combination with discussion of your child's individual services, goals, and objectives identified by the team and listed on the IEP, will guide the team in determining what the least restrictive environment means for your child.

If you prefer that your child receive services in a setting other than a special education classroom or pre-kindergarten classroom (for example, a community preschool program), it will be helpful to first gather some important information related to the following questions:

(1) Has the district ever provided services in this particular setting or a similar setting? If so, to what extent? For example, did a speech and language therapist actually work in this setting or did he or she provide consultative services to the staff?

(2) What support currently exists, both in the proposed setting and within the district?

(3) What barriers currently exist, both in the proposed setting and within the district?

Once these questions have been explored, you can work with your school district to develop a reasonable plan of action. It is important to mention, that if a plan cannot be agreed upon, parents can access their right of due process, beginning with mediation. However, it is also important to mention that this be used only as a last resort.

If your plan includes attendance at a community child care program, you will need to discuss what your responsibility is for the program tuition, both with the child care providers and school district personnel. Many districts will not or cannot use federal and state funds to pay tuition to a private program if the district offers what is perceived as a comparable program that you have elected not to use. In these cases,

some districts have created other methods for paying tuition such as exchanging inservice training for tuition. It is difficult to make a general statement about funding tuition because it varies greatly from district to district and state to state.

## PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

The third step in selecting a program is to determine eligibility for enrollment in the program options that you have identified. The various programs identified by the team may have different eligibility requirements. And private programs may have waiting lists, based on demand for enrollment. It should be noted that the Americans with Disabilities Act states that child care programs are not allowed to refuse services based solely on a child's disability and must make readily achievable accommodations as needed.

## CONSIDERATIONS IN SELECTING A NEW PROGRAM

There are no easy answers to the question, "How do I select the program and services that will be best for my child?". Each child and family are unique and have different strengths, needs, and priorities that will influence which program(s) they select for their child. For many families there are several variables to consider when making decisions about future programs and services. For other families there may be only one or two important factors that are important. It is helpful to identify which factors are most important to your family. This will assist the transition team in developing a list of program options and can serve as a guide to identify how each program option may address the needs of your child and family. Factors that families have identified as important when selecting a new program are listed on the following page. They are listed as questions that may be asked about each program. Space is provided for you to identify the special services that you would like your child to have in the new program.

This list is long because families have different priorities for what they consider important when looking at potential programs. Obviously it would be difficult to consider all of the factors from this list and some may not matter to you. The material is included to help you think about what is most important to your family when selecting a program for your child.

## CONSIDERATIONS IN IDENTIFYING SERVICES AND SELECTING A NEW PROGRAM

_____ What type of special services does my child need in the new program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____ What type of special services are available in the new program and how often can they be provided?

_____ Are there additional special services that would need to be added to the new program in order to meet the needs of my child?

_____ Does the program include both children with special needs and those without identified special needs?

_____ Does the program provide full- or part-day classes?

_____ What are the other children in the program like?

_____ Does the program provide child care for after school hours or transportation to child care services? Will I need to provide transportation for my child?

_____ Where is the program located? Will my child need to take the bus? Is this where my other children go to school?

_____ Is there a cost for this program that the family must pay?

_____ Does my child need access to medical staff?

_____ If so, are medical staff available in this program?

_____ Are there skills and behaviors my child should have before entering this program?

_____ What type of teaching practices are used (direct teaching, play-based, group activities, one-to-one teaching)?

_____ What behavior management or discipline strategies are used? What are the classroom rules?

_____ What is the daily routine?

_____ How many children and adults are in the classroom?

_____ What are the new teachers like? Do the teachers have training and experience with children with special needs? Are the teachers willing and able to make accommodations for children with varying needs?

_____ What are the options and/or requirements for family involvement?

_____ Does the program provide home visits?

_____ Other _____

_____

## LEARNING ABOUT PROGRAM OPTIONS

After service and preschool options have been identified, the next step is to learn about each program and decide how each program meets the needs of your child and family. There are several ways to learn about the program options selected by the team. You can talk to staff in the potential programs, read brochures and other information about the programs, and talk to parents of children in the programs.

One of the best methods to learn about the different program options is to visit each program. Visits to the potential programs may occur when classes are in session or after a daily session. It is important to save time to talk to the teacher or the administrator after you visit a program so you can ask questions and raise any concerns that you may have. The checklist on page 24 and in Handout 7 presents issues to consider when learning about a program. The following list provides tips for visiting programs.

## TIPS FOR VISITING NEW PROGRAMS

- Make an appointment with the program director or classroom teacher.
- Find out where the program is and where to go when you enter the building.
- Find out the name of the teacher and other staff whose class you will be visiting.
- Stop at the office when you enter the building. Many programs require that all visitors sign a form.
- Have a list of items that are important to see or learn about and a list of questions to ask. Find out if you should direct questions to the teacher or director and when you can talk (for example, before, during, or after your observation).
- Don't be surprised if the teacher or director asks questions about your child and family. They may want to learn about you too. Think about what information you want to share about your child and family.
- Take notes if possible. Don't rely on your memory.

IF YOU VISIT WHEN THE CLASS IS IN SESSION, IT WILL BE HELPFUL TO:

- Plan ahead with the teacher for the activities you would like to see (snack, free play, or other activities); find out when those happen and how long you should visit.
- Ask the teacher where you should sit (or stand).
- Ask the teacher how you should react to the children in the class (for example, can you talk to the children or help them if they ask you to do something?).
- Remember that teachers will vary their teaching style across activities, based on the goals of the activities. For example, the teacher may not interact much with some children during free play if her goal is for children to become more independent in playing with peers. On the other hand, the teacher may interact frequently with one child in order to help the child learn to play with certain toys and friends. You may find it helpful to observe more than one activity.
- Remember that the children in this class probably have been in the program for some time—don't assume that the skills and behavior you see when you visit are what will be expected of your child when he or she begins the program.

## SELECTING A NEW PROGRAM

The team will meet to make decisions about special education and related services and to select a new program after your family and other team members have had a chance to learn about the different program options.

Before selecting a new program you may wish to list the factors that are most important for your child and family and then identify how each program addresses these factors. An example of a decision making worksheet to help families do this appears on page 27. This example shows the program options considered by the Tilton family and how each option addressed the family's priorities and concerns. A blank worksheet is provided as Handout 9, for your use as you evaluate program options and select new program placements for your child.

The worksheet for the Tilton family shows that they considered three options for their child, Elise. These options included the ABC Child Care Center, Early Start Special Education Preschool Class, and Edison Child Development Center.

At a team meeting, the Tilton family and other members of the team identified several family preferences and priorities. The most important priorities identified by the family were:

(1) the need for full-day child care,
(2) a desire for Elise to attend the same program as her brother,
(3) the family's ability to pay tuition for a program if required,
(4) the experience of staff in working with children with special needs, and
(5) the accessibility of special services.

Other issues that the family and team thought important to consider included the convenience of the program (hours, location), ability to transport to and from the programs, and the enrollment of both typically developing children and children with special needs. A concern was how enrollment in two programs could be arranged if the Tiltons selected a program that only provided services for half a day.

The Tilton family and other team members then visited each program and met with the program staff to discuss Elise's enrollment and how well the staff believed that they could meet her needs.

At the next team meeting the team identified how each program would meet the five priorities they listed. For example, the worksheet shows that full-day child care could be provided either at the ABC Child Care Center or through enrollment in two half-day programs. After reviewing all of the information on the worksheet, the Tilton family selected the ABC Child Care Center as their first choice for program placement. They felt the ABC Child Care Center best met their priorities for Elise and the family because it provided full-day child care,

## DECISION MAKING WORKSHEET (TILTON FAMILY)

| IMPORTANT FACTORS TO CONSIDER | WAYS TO MEET |
|---|---|
| 1. Full-day child care | ABC Child Care Center<br>Dual enrollment in ABC Child Care Center + half-day program |
| 2. Attending program with brother | ABC Child Care Center |
| 3. Affordable options | ABC Child Care Center<br>Early Start Preschool Special Education<br>Edison Child Development Center too expensive |
| 4. Experience of staff with disabilities | Early Start Preschool Special Education<br>Edison Child Development Center has history of including children with special needs |
| 5. Accessibility to special services | Early Start Preschool Special Education not normally provided in ABC Child Care or Edison Child Development Center |

**ISSUES OR CONCERNS TO ADDRESS**

*CHILD CARE CENTER*

1. Staff training regarding Elise's needs and awareness training regarding disabilities
2. Availability and effectiveness of delivering special services

*EDISON CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER*

1. Affordability of tuition for enrollment in two programs since this is only half-day
2. Availability and effectiveness of delivering special services
3. Potential lack of carryover from special services to remainder of Elise's day spent in child care
4. Elise's tolerance of and adjustment to two programs

*EARLY START PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION*

1. Potential lack of carryover from special services to remainder of Elise's day spent in child care
2. Elise's tolerance of and adjustment to two programs—this program is only half-day
3. Limited opportunities to be with children without special needs

Elise's brother attended the program, they were able to afford the tuition, and the program also included children with and without special needs.

The Tilton family did have some concerns, however, that were also discussed at the team meeting. They were concerned that the staff at the ABC Child Care Center did not have much experience working with children with special needs and wanted to be sure that Elise would receive sufficient special services in the ABC Center. The team first discussed how special services could be offered there. The public school agreed to provide special services by having their therapists consult with the program staff and deliver the services to Elise on a weekly basis. The team also discussed options for including staff from the ABC Child Care Center in meetings to review any concerns or recommendations that the Tilton family or staff might have regarding Elise's progress or the service delivery.

# SHARING INFORMATION IN THE NEW PROGRAM

After your child has moved to preschool it is important for you and staff in the new program to get to know each other and to share information about your child, family, and the new program. You can discuss your concerns, resources, and priorities for your child and family, talk about how you would like to be involved in the new program, and identify things you would like to learn about the new program. The new program staff can provide information about the program and staff and answer any questions you may have. The list that appears on page 29 provides suggestions to help you learn about the new program and share information with program staff.

Two worksheets appear on pages 30-32 and in the Appendix, Handouts 11 and 12. The first worksheet contains questions that may help you share information about your child's strengths and needs. You may wish to fill out the worksheet and share it with program staff or use the questions as a guide when talking with program staff.

The second worksheet is designed to help your family and the new program staff develop a communication schedule so that everyone understands the best times and ways to share information.

- Take your child to visit the new program so that you and your child are familiar with the teacher, the staff, and the new classroom before the program starts.

- Help the new teacher learn about your child's needs, strengths, and abilities. A worksheet to help you share information about your child follows this section.

- Ask the new teacher to keep you informed of the goals and strategies that they use at school. You may want to use these at home.

- Observe your child in the new program. Feel free to ask questions. For example, if you observe during free play and the teacher seems to be just playing with the children, don't assume that this is all the teacher is doing . . . many skills are focused on during play such as language, concept development, and social interaction. If you ask questions, the teacher can explain how she or he provides opportunities for learning during play time.

- Develop a method and schedule of communication with your child's new teacher and other program staff. For example, will you share a home-school notebook? If so, how often? What are the best times for you to call? A sample communication schedule is provided at the end of this section.

- Talk with the staff in your child's new program about options for family involvement. Tell them how you would like to be involved.

- You may want to help other children in the class learn about your child and his or her special needs. Some parents have talked with the other children in the class about special needs or have let the other children experience what it is like to not be able to hear, see, or walk. You can talk to your child's new teacher about this. Some families and programs routinely do this. Others do not and prefer to deal with questions from children if and when they arise. If you do not want to prepare other children, talk with the teacher about how you would like program staff to answer questions raised by other children or families.

## WORKSHEET FOR SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CHILD

One important part of transition is sharing information about your child's needs, strengths, and abilities. The following information will help the staff in the new program learn about and plan for your child.

1. What types of things does your child enjoy learning?

2. What things are the most difficult for your child to learn?

3. What are your child's favorite toys and activities?

4. How does your child get along with other children?

5. What types of rewards work best with your child (for example, hugs, praise, stickers)?

6. What types of discipline work best with your child?

7. What kind of support or help, if any, does your child need during routines such as eating, dressing, toileting, napping, etc.?

8. What was your child working on in the last program that you would like to see continued in the new program?

9. What other goals would you like to see for your child in the new program?

10. What other information would you like to share about your child?

## COMMUNICATION SCHEDULE

| How We Will Communicate | How Often We Will Communicate | | | | Best Times to Communicate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Other | |
| Telephone Calls | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Notes | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Parent/Teacher Conferences | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Home/School Notebook | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Pick Up or Drop Off Talks | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Other _____ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Other _____ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |

# APPENDIX

The handouts in this appendix are designed to help individualize family involvement in transition planning. They can serve as a starting point for discussion concerning transition. Handouts included in this appendix are:

(1) Learning About Transition
(2) Family Involvement in Transition Planning
(3) Strategies that Families Have Used to Prepare Their Child for Preschool
(4) Preparing Your Family for Transition
(5) Participating as a Member of the Transition Team
(6) Sample Transition Timeline
(7) Considerations in Identifying Services and Selecting a New Program
(8) Tips for Visiting New Programs
(9) Decision Making Worksheet
(10) Sharing Information in the New Program
(11) Worksheet for Sharing Information About Your Child
(12) Communication Schedule

The first six handouts may be used durir.. .rly meetings regarding transition. Handouts 7, 8, and 9 address program and service options for preschool. Handouts 10, 11, and 12 should be used in conjunction with a child's entry into a new program. FACTS/LRE grants permission for photocopying of all handouts in this appendix.

Although this manual is written for families, we hope that professionals will use it as well. It is important that professionals read the entire manual before using the handouts. The manual provides additional rationale and information that is not included in the handouts, but that should be discussed with families during transition planning.

## LEARNING ABOUT TRANSITION

An important step in promoting a positive transition for your child and family is learning about the transition process. At least 3 months before your child makes the move from early intervention to preschool someone from the early intervention program will meet with you to talk about transition and will work with you to develop a transition plan.[1] Some of the topics that should be discussed during transition meetings are:

- What is involved in transition?
- When will your child make the transition to a new program?
- What decisions need to be made related to the changes in service delivery?
- Who will be involved in making decisions?
- When will decisions be made?
- What is your family's role in the transition process?
- Is your child eligible for special education and related services?
- What options are available (for example, community preschool, pre-kindergarten, self-contained special education)?
- How can you get information and learn about service options?
- What are the differences between early intervention and preschool programs?
- What are your child's and family's legal rights related to special education services?
- How can you prepare your child and family for transition?

Your family should feel free to ask questions during transition meetings and at any time during the year. Often it is helpful to make a list of questions or topics that you wish to discuss with program staff or the transition team. Space is provided here for you to write questions that you have or issues that you want to talk about.

[1]The federal law requires that planning for transition begin at least 90 days before a child turns 3; in some states, such as Illinois, state law requires that the planning begin even earlier, at least 6 months before the third birthday.



*[FACTS/LRE grants permission for photocopying of this handout.]*

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSITION PLANNING

**This list identifies ways that families have been involved in transition planning. Check the items that you are interested in and then talk with someone in the early intervention program about these items.**

_____ Learn about the transition process and plans that involve my child and family.

_____ Participate in meetings as a member of the planning team.

_____ Participate in evaluating my child's strengths and needs.

_____ Review my child's file and assessment records.

_____ Help select goals that staff will use to prepare my child for transition.

_____ Work on goals to prepare my child and family for upcoming changes.

_____ Help identify my child's educational needs in the new program.

_____ Help identify my child's needs for special services in the new program.

_____ Help identify and evaluate the range of options that are available for preschool programs and services including: (a) school-based programs, (b) community-based programs, and (c) child care or day care programs.

Please list other ways that you would like to be involved in transition.

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## STRATEGIES THAT FAMILIES HAVE USED TO PREPARE THEIR CHILD FOR PRESCHOOL

**This list contains general strategies that families have used to prepare their children for transition. Check items that interest you and talk with someone in the early intervention program about using these strategies.**

_____ Talk to my child about going to a new setting.

_____ Take my child to meet the new program staff and see the new classroom.

_____ Read stories and look at books with my child.

_____ Encourage my child to play alone for short periods of time.

_____ Teach my child self-care skills.

_____ Teach my child to follow simple directions.

_____ Give my child experience with a variety of toys and materials and teach my child how to use toys and materials correctly.

_____ Give my child experience being around other young children.

_____ Teach my child to care for own belongings (for example, how to put toys away, hang coat).

_____ Encourage my child to ask for help when needed.

_____ Encourage my child to communicate with others (children may do this with gestures, spoken language, sign language, etc.).

_____ Encourage my child to make simple choices (for example, ask my child if she wants to wear pink or white socks, what toys he would like to play with, or if she wants cookies or applesauce for snack).

_____ Practice short separations from my child, by leaving him in the care of a responsible adult.

Please list other ways you might prepare your child for transition.

_____

_____

_____

_____



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## PREPARING YOUR FAMILY FOR TRANSITION

Transition can be an exciting time, one that can provide new opportunities for your child and family. It also can be a time of great change and adjustment. Your child or family may need to adjust to new teachers and therapists, new children, different schedules and daily routines, new classroom activities, and new options for parent involvement. You may find that both you and your child experience separation anxiety. It may be hard to "let go" of the staff and services in the early intervention program and to learn to trust and communicate with new staff. Your family may need to learn about the public school system, your child's and family's rights, new evaluations and technical terms, and how to advocate for your child when necessary.

All children and families make adjustments during transition. The amount of time required for these adjustments varies across children, families, and programs. It is normal to experience some uncertainty and with that, some stress during transition. This is true for all families and children who start a new program, regardless of whether the child has special needs. Families who participate in transition planning report reduced stress. Some strategies that families have used to prepare for transition are listed below.

- **Plan ahead for transition.** Don't wait until the last minute to begin thinking about transition. Give yourself and your family time to make decisions and adjust to the changes that will occur.

- **Realize that stress, uncertainty, and separation anxiety are normal emotions**. Many, if not all, parents experience these feelings when their child starts preschool or kindergarten.

- **Ask questions throughout the transition process.** You have a right to obtain information about transition and to be involved in the transition planning.

- **Attend transition planning meetings.** Share information with the team about your child and your family, your resources, your priorities, and any concerns that you may have.

- **Talk with other families who have made the transition from early intervention to preschool programs.**



*[FACTS/LRE grants permission for photocopying of this handout.]*

- **Talk with members of your family about transition and some of the changes that may occur.**

- **Learn about your child's and family's rights, how to interact with new program staff, and how to advocate for your child in the new program.**

- **Visit different programs to help select the program that best meets your child's needs.**

- **Try to identify aspects of the new program that may be different or difficult for your child and give your child experiences with these aspects before the new program begins.** For example, if you think that your child will have trouble working or playing alone, you might give your child an opportunity to play alone for short periods of time each day.

## PARTICIPATING AS A MEMBER OF THE TRANSITION TEAM

### TRANSITION TEAM MEMBERS

An important step in planning for transition is deciding who will be involved and who will serve as members of the transition team. The transition team will work together to develop a transition plan, amend the IFSP, and prepare for the change in programs. The transition team will include family members, staff from the early intervention program, and staff from the potential preschool programs. If your child attends or receives services from more than one early intervention program or will attend or receive services from more than one preschool program, staff from each of these programs should participate on the transition team. This list contains spaces in which to write the name and telephone number of transition team members.

**FROM YOUR FAMILY**

| Name | Relationship to Child | Telephone Number |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**FROM THE CURRENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

| Name | Role | Telephone Number |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**FROM THE NEW POTENTIAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

| Name | Role | Telephone Number |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**OTHERS**

| Name | Role | Telephone Number |
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## BEING PART OF THE TRANSITION TEAM

Working as a team member with other professionals can sometimes be threatening to families and can require some time and know-how. Building a relationship takes time, effort, trust, mutual respect, and communication. Here are some tips for working on a team that may help both families and professionals be equal members of the transition team.

- **Treat each member of the team as an equal.** Remember that each team member brings different expertise, values, and resources to the meeting.
- **Seek information.** It is okay to say "I don't know," "I don't understand," or to ask for assistance or for more information.
- **Share information that will help team members understand your concerns and priorities.** Do not be afraid to state your opinion, answer questions, and discuss your priorities.
- **Share thoughts and feelings about your child's abilities.**
- **Be honest, clear, and direct about your child's needs and your family's concerns, resources, and priorities.**
- **Remember that differences of opinion are okay and are to be expected.** Team meetings are an opportunity to listen to all points of view and to make decisions using negotiation and problem solving.
- **Try to avoid letting past negative experiences influence your current behavior and interactions with members of the team.**
- **Listen to each member of the team.** Try to identify the reasons for their needs or recommendations.
- **Invite other family members or friends who can offer support and advice to attend transition team meetings.**
- **Be sure you are satisfied with decisions that are made before agreeing to them.** If you are not satisfied, be sure to talk to the rest of the team about it.
- **Select a level of team involvement that you are comfortable with and that fits your schedule.**
- **Generate multiple suggestions to address each issue discussed and identify the pros and cons of all suggestions before selecting one.**
- **Carry through on tasks that you have agreed to do.**

## SAMPLE TRANSITION TIMELINE

This sample transition timeline identifies what steps will be followed in transition, who is responsible for each step in the transition process, and when each step will be accomplished. This includes steps that are required by law as part of the IFSP and steps that are options to consider when developing a transition plan.

| Date | Responsibility | |
|---|---|---|
| _____ | _____ | Hold first planning meeting to begin the transition process. |
| _____ | _____ | Develop a transition plan and provide information concerning child and parent rights.* |
| _____ | _____ | Identify goals and methods to prepare the child and family for transition.* |
| _____ | _____ | The family provides consent for release of information to public school and other programs or services.* |
| _____ | _____ | Identify necessary evaluations to determine eligibility for continued special education services and conduct evaluations.* |
| _____ | _____ | The transition team discusses eligibility for continued special education services and other issues related to transition, and identifies future program options (MDC meeting).* |
| _____ | _____ | Members of the transition team visit program options. |
| _____ | _____ | If the child is eligible to receive special services, the transition team writes the IEP and identifies new program(s) and services. |
| _____ | _____ | The family and child visit the new program, meet with the teacher and related services staff. |
| _____ | _____ | The early intervention staff transfers records and contacts the new program staff to exchange information.* |
| _____ | _____ | The child starts the new program on the eligible or agreed upon date.* |
| _____ | _____ | The family meets with the new program staff to assess child adjustment. |
| _____ | _____ | Early intervention and the new program staff evaluate the transition process, including child adjustment and family satisfaction. |

**Steps that are required as part of the IFSP appear with an asterisk.**

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## CONSIDERATIONS IN IDENTIFYING SERVICES AND SELECTING A NEW PROGRAM

**This list includes factors that families have identified as important to consider when selecting a new program. They are listed as questions that may be asked about each program considered. This list also includes space for you to identify the special education and related services that you would like your child to have in the new program. Check those items that are most important to your family and talk with the transition team about these items.**

_____ What type of special services does my child need in the new program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____ What type of special services are available in the new program and how often can they be provided?

_____ Are there additional special services that would need to be added to the new program in order to meet the needs of my child?

_____ Does the program include both children with special needs and those without identified special needs?

_____ Does the program provide full- or part-day classes?

_____ What are the other children in the program like?

_____ Does the program provide child care for after school hours or transportation to child care services? Will I need to provide transportation for my child?

_____ Where is the program located? Will my child need to take the bus? Is this where my other children go to school?

_____ Is there a cost for this program that the family must pay?

_____ Does my child need access to medical staff?

_____ If so, are medical staff available in this program?

_____ Are there skills and behaviors my child should have before entering this program?

_____ What type of teaching practices are used (direct teaching, play-based, group activities, one-to-one teaching)?

_____ What behavior management or discipline strategies are used? What are the classroom rules?

_____ What is the daily routine?

_____ How many children and adults are in the classroom?

_____ What are the new teachers like? Do the teachers have training and experience with children with special needs? Are the teachers willing and able to make accommodations for children with varying needs?

_____ What are the options and/or requirements for family involvement?

_____ Does the program provide home visits?

_____ Other _____

_____



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## TIPS FOR VISITING NEW PROGRAMS

- Make an appointment with the program director or classroom teacher.
- Find out where the program is and where to go when you enter the building.
- Find out the name of the teacher and other staff whose class you will be visiting.
- Stop at the office when you enter the building. Many programs require that all visitors sign a form.
- Have a list of items that are important to see or learn about and a list of questions to ask. Find out if you should direct questions to the teacher or director and when you can talk (for example, before, during, or after your observation).
- Don't be surprised if the teacher or director asks questions about your child and family. They may want to learn about you too. Think about what information you want to share about your child and family.
- Take notes if possible. Don't rely on your memory.

IF YOU VISIT WHEN THE CLASS IS IN SESSION, IT WILL BE HELPFUL TO:

- Plan ahead with the teacher for the activities you would like to see (snack, free play, or other activities); find out when those happen and how long you should visit.
- Ask the teacher where you should sit (or stand).
- Ask the teacher how you should react to the children in the class (for example, can you talk to the children or help them if they ask you to do something?).
- Remember that teachers will vary their teaching style across activities, based on the goals of the activities. For example, the teacher may not interact much with some children during free play if her goal is for children to become more independent in playing with peers. On the other hand, the teacher may interact frequently with one child in order to help the child learn to play with certain toys and friends. You may find it helpful to observe more than one activity.
- Remember that the children in this class probably have been in the program for some time—don't assume that the skills and behavior you see when you visit are what will be expected of your child when he or she begins the program.



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## DECISION MAKING WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to help your family and team members select a new program for your child. First identify the factors that are most important to consider when selecting a new program. Then identify how the different program options can meet each of these factors. You can list other issues or concerns for each program. The information from this worksheet can be considered by the team when selecting a program and developing a plan to provide special education services for your child.

| IMPORTANT FACTORS TO CONSIDER | WAYS TO MEET |
|---|---|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| 6. | |
| 7. | |
| 8. | |

ISSUES TO ADDRESS



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## SHARING INFORMATION IN THE NEW PROGRAM

**This list includes strategies that families have used to learn about the new program. Some of the strategies will help your child and family become familiar with the new program. Other strategies will help your family and program staff share information about your family and the program.**

- Take your child to visit the new program so that you and your child are familiar with the teacher, the staff, and the new classroom before the program starts.
- Help the new teacher learn about your child's needs, strengths, and abilities.
- Ask the new teacher to keep you informed of the goals and strategies that they use at school. You may want to use these at home.
- Observe your child in the new program. Feel free to ask questions. For example, if you observe during free play and the teacher seems to be just playing with the children, don't assume that this is all the teacher is doing . . . many skills are focused on during play such as language, concept development, and social interaction. If you ask questions, the teacher can explain how she or he provides opportunities for learning during play time.
- Develop a method and schedule of communication with your child's new teacher and other program staff. For example, will you share a home-school notebook? If so, how often? What are the best times for you to call?
- Talk with the staff in your child's new program about options for family involvement. Tell them how you would like to be involved.
- You may want to help other children in the class learn about your child and his or her special needs. Some parents have talked with the other children in the class about special needs or have let the other children experience what it is like to not be able to hear, see, or walk. You can talk to your child's new teacher about this. Some families and programs routinely do this. Others do not and prefer to deal with questions from children if and when they arise. If you do not want to prepare other children, talk with the teacher about how you would like program staff to answer questions raised by other children or families.



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## WORKSHEET FOR SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CHILD

**One important part of transition is sharing information about your child's needs, strengths, and abilities. The following information will help the staff in the new program learn about and plan for your child.**

1. What types of things does your child enjoy learning?

2. What things are the most difficult for your child to learn?

3. What are your child's favorite toys and activities?

4. How does your child get along with other children?

5. What types of rewards work best with your child (for example, hugs, praise, stickers)?



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6. What types of discipline work best with your child?

7. What kind of support or help, if any, does your child need during routines such as eating, dressing, toileting, napping, etc.?

8. What was your child working on in the last program that you would like to see continued in the new program?

9. What other goals would you like to see for your child in the new program?

10. What other information would you like to share about your child?

## COMMUNICATION SCHEDULE

This worksheet is designed to help your family and program staff develop a communication schedule so that everyone understands the best times and ways to share information. This sheet can be completed by your family and program staff after discussing how and when you will communicate.

| How We Will Communicate | How Often We Will Communicate | | | | Best Times to Communicate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Other | |
| Telephone Calls | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Notes | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Parent/Teacher Conferences | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Home/School Notebook | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Pick Up or Drop Off Talks | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Other _____ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Other _____ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |



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# THE FACTS/LRE PROJECT

The FACTS/LRE project, initiated in January 1993, is an outreach/technical assistance grant funded by the federal Office of Special Education Programs, Early Childhood Branch. The Project Director is Dr. Susan Fowler.

## BACKGROUND

The passage of Public Law 99-457 in 1986 created two early childhood programs for children with special needs, intended to provide a seamless service system for families and their young children between birth and age 5. Planning is required to avoid ruptures in this system when families and children change service providers.

Programs report confusion regarding their roles and responsibilities related to transition between services, screening, referral, evaluation, exchange of records, planning of transition, provision or continuation of services and conflicts regarding placement decisions, extended school year, procedural safeguards, preparation of personnel and other issues. At the same time, families describe a service system that too often is not responsive to their needs, not culturally and linguistically sensitive, and not delivered in the least restrictive environment.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Our two outreach channels are publications and technical assistance. In both our writing and our direct technical assistance, we encourage communities to build the following five components into the transition process:

1. Interagency agreements among service providers at the state and local levels
2. Transition planning for families to ensure they can make informed decisions
3. Timelines and guidelines which cover child assessments, transfer of records, program visits and other matters
4. Strategies to promote entry and adjustment of children—with specific emphasis on successful entry into nonspecialized, community-based settings to receive services in the least restrictive environment
5. Evaluation of the process

DESIGN: GRAPHIC SOLUTIONS, CHAMPAIGN, IL